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## PROFESSIONAL WRESTLERS PUT THE SMACKDOWN ON V CORPS SOLDIERS IN IRAQ

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**FORWARD OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, Iraq** — Hundreds of Soldiers crowded around a ring here, ready to get the smackdown.



SPC SHERREE CASPER

Soldiers of V Corps' 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division make up a large part of the crowd at a World Wrestling Entertainment event at Forward Operating Base Speicher in Tikrit, Iraq, watching Rey Mysterio (top) prepare to land a blow on Kurt Angle as Eddie Guerrero lays on the mat. The event was taped for a two-hour broadcast that will air in the U.S. December 23, and in Europe on AFN Atlantic at 6 a.m. December 24.

The Soldiers had packed in to see 20 professional wrestlers from World Wrestling Entertainment who came here from the U.S. to salute troops while giving them a taste of their uniquely American entertainment with a powerful twist.

The group traveled throughout the area of operations of V Corps' 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division to visit with Soldiers, shaking countless hands and posing for numerous photos. And, of course, wrestling.

This is the second time WWE wrestlers have been to Iraq. They were in Baghdad a year ago.

WWE and Armed Forces Entertainment got together to bring the program to the troops.

"I wanted to salute all the men and women who serve their country and WWE for volunteering for this event," said Art Myers, the AFE coordinator.

WWE chairman Vince McMahon and ring announcer Lilian Garcia agreed they would never forget the faces and smiles of the Soldiers here.

"To see the Soldiers smile; to see what they have gone through; to touch their life -- I will never forget," Garcia said.

The wrestlers split into three groups and traveled to 20 forward operating bases here. Several division units provided the groups with security, transportation, billeting, and flights, while more than 20 members of the Division Support Command set up the stage for the final production, a two-hour event that was taped for broadcast.

"I want to thank all who were involved in putting this together," McMahon added.

Spc. Dale Tackett of Youngstown, Ohio's 216th Engineer Battalion was one of the troops who provided security for the event. A WWE fan, Tackett was elated to be a part of it.

"I watch this as a father-son duo at home. I am very thrilled to get the opportunity to see this," said Tackett.

Spc. Luis Ocasio of the division's 2nd Battalion, 1st Aviation is an even bigger fan -- he even deployed here with a WWE championship belt he bought while on duty in Kosovo.

"I'm so motivated to see this show, to see the wrestlers, to meet them," Ocasio said.

The wrestlers and production crew volunteered to come here to entertain Soldiers. After concluding an event in the States, they rushed to hop through several flights and several countries to get here. But when they arrived, they hit the ground running, visiting troops.

This trip was the fourth here for WWE wrestler John Bradshaw Layfield (JBL). Layfield said as an American, he is doing what all Americans should do -- support their troops.

"As long as there are Soldiers who are not home, then I will come see them," Layfield said.

The two-hour WWE show taped in Tikrit is scheduled to air in the U.S. December 23. In Europe it will air on AFN Atlantic at 6 a.m. December 24.

